

# House Education & the Workforce Committee

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# ISSUE SUMMARY

## H.R. 1 Promotes Reading First

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 38 percent of fourth graders cannot read at a basic level -- that is, they cannot read and understand a short paragraph that one would find in a simple children's book. Research continues to show that reading failure has devastating consequences on self-esteem, social development, and opportunities for advanced education and meaningful employment. Tragically, reading failure disproportionately affects children who live in poverty. Indeed, nearly 70 percent of inner city and rural students cannot read at a proficient level.

The National Center for Education Statistics recently reported average scores for fourth-graders have shown *no improvement* over the past eight years (based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress). The most recent NAEP results revealed that 63 percent of black fourth graders, 58 percent of Hispanics, 60 percent of children in poverty, and 47 percent of children in urban schools scored at "below basic" reading competency levels.

According to National Education Goal Panel report, only two states, Georgia and Massachusetts, reduced the gap between white students and black or Hispanic students. On average, whites scored 33 points ahead of blacks and 29 points ahead of Hispanics. (Generally speaking, 10 points equals what a student learned in one grade.)

Within ethnic groups, the achievement gap between the best and worst readers has also widened. For example, as reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, "the best-performing black children scored 99 points better than the worst-performing blacks," compared to an 86-point difference roughly eight years ago.

**Improving education starts with a belief that every American child can learn to read. President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* proposal would award grants to states that establish comprehensive reading programs anchored in scientific research. The President's Reading First initiative gives states both the funds and the tools they need to eliminate the reading deficit because a child's success in school -- and indeed life -- is dependent upon his or her ability to read.**

- While we celebrate those who are scoring well, we can't turn a blind eye to those who are not. Nor we can turn a blind eye to the failure of Title I money to improve our schools.
- Students best learn through explicit, systematic phonics instruction, vocabulary development, quality literature, and comprehension strategies that provide reading practice.
- H.R. 1 focuses on effective, proven methods of reading instruction based on scientific research.
- The bill authorizes an extra \$600 million next year for reading programs -- tripling federal literacy funding from the present \$300 million to \$900 million in 2002.

- The President would spend \$5 billion over the next five years on reading programs for children between kindergarten and third grade.
- By funding effective reading instruction programs, the Bush plan ensures that more children will receive the help they need before they fall too far behind.
- Better reading programs mean fewer children in special education and fewer children dropping out of high school.